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ABSTRACT

If students are to learn as much as they can, they should themselves choose what they wish to study. College faculties who set up course requirements, for whatever ostensible reason, are usurping a function which belongs to the student. Explicit guidance, in the form of advice from a faculty member, is better than the implicit guidance of course requirements. Perhaps the faculty is less to blame for the present situation than are administrators. Administrators have the function of allocating and acquiring resources. Too often, decisions on these matters are made for transient, trivial, or merely traditional reasons. A simulation lasting for eight months and involving from 200 to 500 students was set up to explore an alternative way of deciding work. (JK)

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THE CONFLAGRATION OF A STRAW STALKING HORSE:

or

PEOPLE LEARN ALL THE TIME

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I.

Philosophical Substrate: Biases and Opinions

People learn all the time. It is hard to conceive of a situation in which no learning takes place, or of situations in which a human being acts like Weiner's Golem and learns only that which he is ordered to learn.

People learn. Most young people learn faster than most older people. Most learn fastest when around others who are straining to learn as much as possible. People learn by seeing things done, then doing them and being criticized, and then watching and criticizing their own performance. Self-criticism seems to derive part of its effectiveness from the fact that it is harder to rationalize the judgement that you've failed when the judge is yourself and not one whose task can be thought to be finding and announcing your failures. (This assumes, of course, that self-flagellation is not a compensatory mechanism in use.) And an important spur to quickened learning is the realization that others are learning, or have learned, more and had no more time in which to do it than you have had. Perhaps the greater

spur is the recognition/decision that learning is desirable/necessary.

A brilliant and dedicated scholar/researcher may have, after a decade of mature professional effort, half-a-hundred "lectures" in him. Yet, if he has a "12 hr. load" he, in an academic year, is supposed to either deliver each of those fifty or so lectures seven or eight times, or have prepared on the order of three hundred and fifty lectures. It makes one think of a typical early mathematics problem: If a man can make 10 widgets of x quality in t time, what will be the quality of the widgets if he makes 1000 in $\frac{1}{4}t$?

If a faculty member is charged with producing verbiage, he can do it! The question is, what happens to the educational system when that is only too obviously all that he is doing? There may well be a Gresham's law of intellectual coinage that comes into operation.

A dedicated teacher realizes, among other things, just how seldom he is needed. And how difficult it is to recognize an occasion on which he is needed.

A thoughtful person soon realizes that the process of education, for the most part, as it is presently practiced in these United States, consists largely of fraud piled upon fraud in that we require, as institutional officers, that which we know to be ridiculous when we think as individuals. It is merely sordid that our rationale as institutional officers is predominantly budgetary-political. As institutional officers we have the Caiaphas syndrome: What shall we do then? If we allow this unrest, this deviation from the past, the

uglies will come and take away our place and our nation. (And they might, too!)

People learn. Educational institutions, in their roles as surrogate grandmothers, are responsible for seeing to it that each succeeding generation comes to share enough of the values of the preceding generation that social continuity is maintained. Educational institutions have a simplistic conception of this part of their role. That it is a simplistic conception may not be a bad thing, either, since it is probable that no social institution can adequately substitute for a grandmother, and thus a social institution that had an impact while attempting to be a grandmother might well do serious damage to that social continuity, desire for which had bred the effort in the first place. The simplistic approach to the institutional role is at least partly attributable, oddly enough, to the geographical mobility and economic affluence of our student population. These two factors cause registrars and admissions officers trouble in assessing transcripts of transfer students. (Thanks to the NEA and other regulatory agencies we have had, for some time, a fair amount of comparability across high schools -- at least within regions sometimes as large as several counties.)

It seems to me that one of the great sources of trouble in this, or any other time is the complusion-to-be-*sure* that many men in positions of influence and power seem to have. Perhaps this characteristic helped place them where they are. Ironically, many of these men seem to think that, although

still somewhat sullied by their own personalities, they have made great strides toward the objectification of their lives, and certainly have thoroughly objectified their professional decision process. Tragically, these men often are unwilling to attribute to others any capacity for a rationality in which personal characteristics play only their warranted parts. Men reveal this identifying characteristic when they query a statement not by probing its possible data substrate but by impugning the motivation of he who makes the statement.

These characteristics described above, it is possible, are exhibited by men who see no alternatives. And seeing no alternatives may contribute to the exhibition of those characteristics. My philosophy of education with respect to communication, or anything else, becomes manifest as I attempt to establish situations in which students have, and have chances to see that they have, as many alternatives as possible.

Note that the student is thus in control. He is, anyway, in the sense that if he withdraws from the educational situation it no longer exists. At least, it no longer is possible to fashion from it anything, not even the most pedestrian grandmother ever imagined! But in a stricter sense he controls because I use my alternatives to multiply his. Ashby's law, the "law of requisite variety", awards the student control...of his own learning process.

A man's mind may be imprisoned, but not usually by anything so simple and so ineffective as a modern educational institution. If modern educational institutions are serving as imprisoning devices it is by omission, by forfeiting their contrary role.

There are at least two broad categories of motivation that bring men and women to universities. One is the desire for a social and economic *imprimatur* that will, without too much inconvenience, aid considerably in establishing them in some socio-economic context. Henri Beyle, signing himself "Stendahl", wrote *LE ROUGE ET NOIR* dedicating it to "The Happy Few" (thought to be the citizens of the United States). The novel's title may symbolize the two routes by which an untitled and impoverished young man then might have sought to rise: the red is the military, or government service, while the black is the church. Commerce was only beginning to become one of the accepted routes upward. In our time, both the red route and the black route, however their exact character may have otherwise altered, require the entrants be already "credentialized" (horrid word) in their possession of a baccalaureate degree.

The second of the two broad categories of motivation is summarized as "the seeking after knowledge". The very best of those in this category are possibly relatively unaffected by the condition of the university considered as a social institution. And, although they are the finest flower of the university, they may contribute no more to the university's social institutional

dimensions than a flower contributes to the garden in which it grows -- perhaps a certain enhancement of the reputation of the garden and the gardener.

No matter, though, what the motivation, what the men and women who come to our universities learn will be responsive to what they find there. And no matter what they find there, they will learn.

The father who is continually correcting his son is the classically rejected father. Folk wisdom proposes that the children of preachers and ministers are especially likely to be less governed by social precepts internalized from their childhood experiences with their parents. I suppose this statement continues to be reproduced for two reasons, at least. One is the petty and pusillanimous malice some people exhibit. The other is that the vigor and the repetitiveness with which these social precepts are urged by the parents becomes, in and of itself, sufficient cause for rejection of the precepts, as well as for rejection of the parents who advanced the precepts with such singleminded stupidity.

In universities the curriculum, with all of the administrative paraphrenalia it apparently requires, is the parallel of the parental monomania with "teaching" "right" speech and "right" acts. The flaw of the conception of "rightness" is uncertainty of all that we call the world. That is also the flaw in the conception of "teaching" as a way to control behavior *a priori*. Of course there are criteria for discriminating among alternative ways of doing things. That

process of discrimination is not what is usually intended by the term "right", I think.

Because different people learn different materials at different rates in different ways in different circumstances at different times, I think it impossible to specify a curriculum even satisfactory for very many, let alone optimum for most.

What is all the fuss about? Why do so many supposedly well educated men spend so much time in committee meetings to hash out the curricular matters some other group of supposedly equally well educated men has offered them for consideration? Well, first ought to be mentioned that the men have learned that to meet in these committees is to be rewarded. Such activitiy is counted favorably when higher administrators are deciding salary and rank increases. Secondly there is the possibility that these men enjoy the social contact which occurs at the committee meetings. Thirdly there is the possibility that these men see membership on and attendance at the committee as a mark of social status, and, further, as an aid in their own personal effort to keep track of their own identities. (Cf. E.A. Poe's short story, "Man of the Crowd".)

The curriculum is supposed to ensure that all the students share a subset of the set called "all knowledge". But if knowledge is useful and the situation is one the student see as requiring the information in order that he successfully adapt to, or otherwise handle the situation, he will search out the

information and use it. If he does not see the information as useful to him he will not retain whatever small portion of it is somehow slipped or forced into his mind. Further, he will rapidly and effectively find ways to vitiate whatever the system is that is used to enforce upon him what he believes to be an empty task.

The work "use" requires some definition. It is not restricted to the simple physical interdependence of the digger and his digging tool. It includes the use of poetry, sorrow and gladness, pleasure and pain. It is hard for any man to know with any exactness what constitutes the "uses" another man sees.

Aside from all these and similar motivations that might be suggested speculatively, there is the belief of these men that if the curriculum is not fixed either a) students won't learn what they (are supposed to) need to learn or b) we won't know what they have learned and therefore won't know which students should get degrees and which shouldn't. The implication is quite clear that faculty, appropriately guided by administrators, know what is best for students. They well may. But I am far more secure in the assumption that faculty and administrators know what is good for faculty and administrators.

The faculty seem to have less responsibility in all this than administrators. Perhaps I provincially reflect my own surroundings too much,

but the same names have been appearing on the same committees for a long time now. I suspect that there are covert administrators among the faculty! Or at least faculty covertly, and not so covertly, hopeful of becoming administrators.

The reason the administrators of our institutions must bear the heavy final responsibility is because they control, overtly and covertly, most resource allocation and most resource acquisition. They control the institutional reward system. In the group I am calling "administrators" I include boards of trustees, regents, relevant subsets of members of legislatures, and political penjandrums and pundits.

Another reason the "fuss" arises is because universities are important to men. They are more important, say, than hospitals. A university is more important because a university, in good working order, could produce not only the idea of a hospital, but the thing itself. The same procreational possibility is not so clearly inherent in a hospital. But here we speak of social institutions -- "university" and "hospital" do not stand for functions (neither is antecedent to the other functionally), but for structures. Structure is a residue of function. To the extent function changes, prior structures may be inhibiting, or even debilitating. Unless, of course, the structure self-liquifies.

Because Universities are important to men it is distressing when universities do not do so well as seems possible for them to do with the massive

resources that have been and that are being devoted to their operation. That hardly anyone inside a university administration is willing to say that the resources are enough does not destroy the possibility that the resources are, in fact, too plentiful. That out of this pleasant flower, richness, we have plucked the nettle, wasteful greed. The waste arises because of the extent, perhaps, to which universities have become clubs of administrators protecting themselves by offering up students and/or faculty, whichever scapegoat is handiest.

What often seems to happen is that resource allocation and acquisition, in spite of or perhaps because of the much vaunted, although illusory, objectification of the decision process, gets done on transient and/or trivial and/or traditional bases only. The preservation of one's own position becomes so overweening in importance that the delusion of objectification is the major defense against changes sensed as tending to dimish administrative job security. (I *don't* think the answer is tenure for administrators! Nor is the answer student membership on committees!)

Fred Hechinger wrote an article along these lines recently titled: Who's in Charge Here? I agree with him that universities are suffering not so much from bad leadership as from the absence of leadership -- and perhaps that is the worst sort of leadership. The formal structure role-slots are filled, while function goes a-begging.

Curricula are not all bad. Some structure is needed to define alternatives

and thus provide implicit guidance. Why not let explicit guidance come from some mind rather than a catalog? The difficulty here is that faculty are thought to be poor advisors for students. But is the entire faculty bad at advising for all students? Of course not. Students who are interested in the credentializing function of the university, and faculty interested in research and scholarship and teaching should probably never be left alone in the same room with one another. To do so only heightens the disgust which they conceive for one another. For those who only wish credentials there should be a curriculum that would make the most rigid and hidebound faculty type ecstatic. For those whose interests are different a requirementless curriculum would be available.

How would people be "assigned" to these two "tracks"? You, dear reader, haven't been paying attention. To think of the above as "tracks" to which you are going to "assign" people is to have fallen into one of the most ludicrous of errors. You are attempting to *order* people to *be free*. Students would sort themselves into the various categories. For there are not merely two categories above, there are many.

I am personally suited by temperament and professional experience and training for the latitudinarian path. And it is such a curriculumless curriculum that I think it possible to have a non-computerized relatively parameter free long term large scale social simulation as a part of an undergraduate experience in a degree program in management, administration, political science, socialpsychology, or whathaveyou.

II.

How Does Philosophy Translate Into Practice?

With difficulty and uncertainty, obviously. It isn't clear that philosophies are meant to translate into practice. It would seem that philosophies and practices are translated the one into the other only at the very gravest risks.

Any pedagogy that departs from the "received" pedagogy must win its way against all comers with minimal help in the budgetary-political arena. To the extent that the above described philosophy is in any way a departure a very important aspect of its embodiment will be the political stresses that embodiment engenders in the rest of the institution's members. Note that these stresses are never very great. It is only that they are annoying to those who sense them because they seem to be, to those people, anomalies of dubious functionality. Too, the stresses seem not to be necessary components of the cost of operation. The "cost of operation" is usually a sloppily accounted gestalt of the individual's history.

In the time that I was associated with a large scale (200-500 students) long term (eight months duration) relatively parameter free non-computerized social simulation it came to be a familiarly referred to as the "artifical society". I will hereafter abbreviate that to AS.

"Relatively parameter free" means that the parameters were numerous and powerful, but derived not so much from the university, or anything in it,

as from the socio-cultural matrix in which students and faculty and administrators were spawned. There was an AS rule book consisting of two things: a) the way to get the action started; and b) veiled -- sometimes heavily and sometimes thinly -- hints and suggestions about ways to have fun with, and to learn from the AS.

In brief, the AS was a collection of mutually evaluating groups whose leaders had had to apply for the role of leader and who had been selected to fill that role, initially, by a committee of the faculty-in-charge. These leaders exhibited greater or lesser longevity in their roles, depending on ... a large number of variables.

The leaders, called "company presidents," then negotiated with the remaining people for "employees". These groups altered their memberships over the duration of the simulation much as any other group so formed might alter its makeup. Each group produced products. These were usually papers in various forms. Some were scheduled and had had some of their characteristics specified, others were open. The groups could also do research of the contract type, and of the grant type. Individuals leaving "companies" could go on the dole, or could set up individual consulting operations and work with "companies" or the government. Dropping out of the simulation meant shifting to another college, and not just to another major since participation in the simulation was a graduation requirement for the college.

There had to be a "government" composed of students to monitor and regulate activity. The three faculty-in-charge could not have hoped to do all the work required. Involvement with the simulation never earned a faculty member a reduced load. Indeed, as you might expect, usually the most active faculty were those involved with the simulation. So, there was a government "administrator" chosen much as the "company presidents" were. The "administrator" then negotiated with the faculty-in-charge committee for "funds" with which to attract people to government jobs to provide the services required. Only a few of these services were required by the faculty-in-charge committee. The rest arose from the desires of members of the society, including members of government staff.

Litigation arose, and arbitration was required from time to time. These services were supplied, for a fee, by members of the AS.

Income was generated by the products the groups made, and by research activities. The faculty-in-charge committee could, and did, create money by authorizing deficit spending by the government and by choosing the various values that went into the formulae that charged the points received from ranking the products into points that constituted the medium of exchange in the AS. The value of the money was determined by what the AS did. The products were ranked by the companies, until the number of copies that would have been required became a dollar burden upon the students. At that

point the groups were broken into subsets, according to various rules, for the ranking process.

The formulae for converting rankings into points were altered from time to time. The pattern of alteration might be designed to emphasize the benefits of learning, or the notion of an economy of abundance, or something else of that general nature.

Changes in the formulae didn't seem to contribute much to the fundamental nature of the AS. That is, the formulae could be varied substantially and the same sort of events occurred. There was always some nobility, and some chicanery. There were dropouts, and there were apostles. (I never figured out what to do with either of those groups.)

There was learning.

What always seemed best, though certainly it happened only seldom, was when some student, or group of students would step back and see that they had "re-invented the wheel". That is, the AS was no better and no worse than had been the larger "real" society. The students, the people who each year formed anew the AS *could* have created some sort of Utopian clime in which they might have prospered. They did not.

That the faculty-in-charge were probably not seen as authoritarian-dogmatic is best symbolized by a "portrait" presented by one student group to a faculty member. The faculty member was depicted with his arms folded and something of a smile on his face. The caption read: It's your decision.

There is little question that different folks responded differently to the different experiences they had in the AS. Some who began the AS as accounting majors would switch to, say, marketing, while some who had been majoring in marketing would switch to accounting. In these shifts of major by some of the students apparently lie some of the sources of discontent for faculty who identify narrowly with those and other specialities.

Perhaps the most important point is that no examinations were given on the grounds that the variety possible in the learning situation was so great that no examination procedure of reasonable cost could be thought useful. Another way to put this is that the system was thought to display equifinality among many dimensions, but none of the faculty associated with the AS was ever clever enough to reduce any dimension(s) to a form that made it (them) susceptible of examination in the usual ways.

A number of ways of describing the phases through which AS's seemed to move have been proposed. The most straightforward labels the phases: 1) start-up; 2) novelty/exploration; 3) recognition/adaptation; 4) alternative reduction/conflict; 5) shut-down. Notice that there is no explicit resolution of whatever the conflict phase may have generated. That resolution had to be a process internal in each individual.

III.

Summary

Maybe some are impatient with my reiteration of the simple assertion that people learn. It seemed necessary. It is hard to understand what has happened to education in the United States, especially higher education, unless the assumption is made that many of those whose decisions, taken and omitted, have formed what we now have were convinced that learning could not, and would not occur unless THEY *controlled* in a highly restrictive fashion, as contrasted with a directive fashion.

It seems to me that what I do and have done, along with some others, by the way of a professional pedagogy is justified by the simple set of statements following:

People learn.

Most people learn a lot of the same things. (Else there is no"society".)

Twelve years of formal education is long enough to learn "the same things".

Universities are for learning what no one knows yet; and for acquiring credentials.

Four years is a long time to spend acquiring credentials, but it is not nearly long enough to learn very much of what no one yet knows.

Other such statements are possible -- perhaps even necessary. But these few give the flavor of the whole set.